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THE INFINITE PASSION

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Being the Celebrated
Rimas and the *Letters*
to an Unknown Woman of
Gustavo Adolfo Becquer

Translated from the Spanish by
YOUNG ALLISON



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BECQUER AND HIS WORK

Gustavo Adolfo Becquer — Seville's "gentlest-dreaming singer"—is Spain's contribution to that illustrious galaxy of ill-starred poets whose lives seem to have been marred by a lack of beauty and ease as great as the consummate beauty and ease they have left in their creations. Under the burden of poor health and adversity almost from earliest infancy, Becquer—in less than half the allotted span of life—struck the flint of his mortal lot with the steel nib of his courage and awoke sparks of the divine flame that today gleam farther than ever before.

Scarcely more than a dozen years intervened between the publication of his first tale and his death. In that space he produced material of the first water, enough to fill three slender volumes, with possibly as much more awaiting recognition, identification, and collection from the scattered periodicals in which they first appeared. Becquer has been dead now more than half a century. The simple magic of his verse and the fluent charm of his prose have long since won their way into Spanish hearts, until his fame has spread wherever the Spanish tongue prevails. Curiously enough, he has remained almost unknown in English, although seemingly well translated into French and German. Yet the genius of Becquer is closely akin to that of English, and his creations decidedly betray as close an affinity for the Northern

spirit as for the Latin. Becquer, in fact, through his ancestry, fused the Germanic idealism into the Latin passion and evoked a combination filled with the beauties of both.

While his language is typical of Spain and Spanish, his spirit is artistically universal, owing no doubt partly to his mixture of Nordic lineage and Latin birth, if chiefly to the universality of all genius.

* * *

Gustavo Adolfo Claudio Domínguez Bastida Becquer was born February 17, 1836, at Seville, in Andalusia; the fourth of eight sons whose father was an artist of considerable local repute. The Becquer family was of noble blood and had been of some distinction in Seville for more than two centuries before the poet's birth. Toward the beginning of the 17th century — perhaps during the latter years of the 16th — one Michael Adam Becker had come from Flanders to settle in the Andalusian city. This Becker promptly set forth to become an Andalusian; his name is recorded in 1622 as Miguel Adam Becquer (sometimes Bécquer to indicate the accent on the first syllable); his kinsman, Don Martín Becquer, a man of property and a *veinticuatro* or alderman of Seville, married a Spanish wife and became the progenitor of the poet, Gustavo Adolfo Becquer — who two centuries later used sometimes to write his name *Becker* in memory of the old surname.

Gustavo's father died when the boy was five years old. His mother's death left him full orphaned at ten. An

uncle took charge of him for awhile and then his god-mother, a pious soul who would have turned him into a merchant, charged herself with his upbringing.

His literary tendencies appeared early. Before he was eleven, in collaboration with a school-mate a year older, he had written and produced a melodrama and had commenced a novel. At his godmother's he found a library of parts and read omnivorously — Walter Scott, Horace, and various Spanish writers, the foreign works in translation, of course. He also began to write verse, of which none seems to have been preserved. When he was about fourteen another uncle, an artist, began to instruct Gustavo in drawing but, painter though he was, he perceived the boy's superior ability in literature. This uncle used to tell Gustavo, "You will never make a good painter, but a bad writer," and encouraged him in writing verse, besides also procuring him lessons in Latin.

It was about this time that Gustavo, together with two other adolescent lads, planned a volume of verse to which all three were to contribute. This volume was to be published in Madrid and the three were to become wealthy off the proceeds. One day they were making advance estimates of their future fortune and Becquer, apparently the leading spirit, airily named 270,000 *reales* (about \$13,500) as the very least they could expect. Then he swiftly tabulated the directions in which all this money was to be spent: 30,000 for lodgings; 60,000 for clothing; 20,000 for travel; 40,000 for food; another 40,000 for service and equipages; 20,000 for love affairs. The

total came to only 210,000 *reales*; so Gustavo unhesitatingly added to the list, "60,000 *reales* for deeds of charity." Which balanced the account that was never to be realized. The anecdote indicates that the poet was a man of action and decision, even though never a financial success.

Another evidence of his decision appears in his removal to Madrid. His biographers disagree as to the date, two putting it in the fall of 1853, one in the early months of 1854. At any rate, he left Seville, against the protests of his godmother, and settled in Spain's capital, with great dreams of waging a living with his poetry. Had he stayed in Seville and become a merchant it is likely that he would have inherited his godmother's comparative wealth and died without leaving a priceless heritage of poetry and prose. In Madrid he lived between poverty and want for three years. In 1857 or 1858 — again his biographers disagree — he fell severely ill with the affliction which never thereafter deserted him. It was some kind of ailment which attacked the chest — possibly tuberculosis in some form, though the records fail to state. At any rate one of his friends, calling on the sick man, ran across the completed manuscript of a tale which he read, urged its publication and secured its editorial acceptance. It is interesting to relate here that the tale bore the subtitle, "Indian Tradition," and so faithfully was the atmosphere set down that it was for years after known as Becquer's "Indian Translation"—the two words looking and sounding rather alike in Spanish.

Recovering from his sickness, Becquer regained his strength in long solitary walks about Madrid and during these strolls it is said he first began to compose poetry.

He next was given clerical employment in a government bureau at a salary of something like \$150 a year — 3,000 *reales*. Before long he was incontinently discharged when surprised “during office hours” entertaining himself and the staff by sketching a fantastic picture of Ophelia. Then he made his living for a while by painting figures in a mural decoration to help a painter who had the contract but could not do the work.

Becquer’s biographers are in almost hopeless disagreement over the poet’s affair of the heart. It is related that he met in Madrid, and fell swiftly in love with, Julia Espín y Guillén, daughter of the orchestra director at the Teatro Real; and that this love, which remained unrequited, was the moving force inspiring the poet’s despair and his best work. On the other hand it is related with apparently equal authority that his love for the fair Julia was a Quixotic affair, conducted at a distance, like a medieval knight worshipping and suffering from afar — and that Becquer never in fact spoke to the lady except once, after her marriage. One account has it that Becquer was a frequent visitor at her dwelling, and that she openly scorned him. At any rate, whichever account is right, his affection was not requited, and in May, 1861, he contracted a hapless marriage with Casta Estéban y Navarro, daughter of a country doctor of Soria. The bond did not hold long, but before it gave way children were born.

Two biographers mention two sons; one speaks of three sons; perhaps one died in infancy. When the parents separated, Becquer took the children with him and supported them to the end.

Contributions of prose and verse to various periodicals supplied Becquer for the rest of his life with a scanty means of existence. Much of his work was done under the spur of need — to pay for food or medicines that would not brook delay. His chronic weakness made necessary frequent breaks in his work and occasional journeys to the cleaner air of the mountains, thus hindering any accumulation of means and dissipating any surplus laid by. One such journey, in 1864, kept the poet in retirement for a full year; while his next older brother, Valeriano Becquer, accompanied him and worked at his art, painting. Gustavo also earned much of his keep, these last years of his life, by translating current French novels, a task he despised yet could not choose but accept.

Fortune seemed once ready to smile on Becquer when he was made censor of novels under Isabel II. The post paid him 10,000 *reales* a year — about \$500 — and the duties were not onerous. In this resulting leisure Becquer collected his scattered verse and completed a volume by adding unpublished poems. That manuscript is said to have been lost during the revolution of 1863 and Becquer later rewrote the poems from memory. What was worse, his post was lost and the poet was left without immediate prospects.

The two brothers, Gustavo and Valeriano, stayed to-

gether, worked together, suffered together, from 1864 on. The hardships they encountered were too much. Valeriano expired September 23, 1870, in his brother's arms. Gustavo never recovered from the blow.

Two months later, on December 22, 1870, Gustavo Adolfo Becquer died. A little before the end he turned to the group of friends at his bedside and said, "Take care of my children." His last words were: "All mortal" (*Todo mortal*).

* * *

All his short life Becquer's fame had skirted oblivion. Not until after his death was any effort made to publish his works and then the task was undertaken by friends for the double purpose of raising a memorial to the dead and of securing funds for the upbringing of Becquer's fatherless children. A first edition was soon exhausted; so were a second and third. Within seven years after his death four large editions of his work had appeared. To-day some 400 editions of his lyric poems — the *Rimas* — have been published in Spanish, two of them in the United States.

Why Becquer should so long have remained comparatively unknown in English is a mystery which may never be solved. It would seem that his heritage of Northern blood, fused by Latin fire into the passionate body of Andalusian breeding, should and would make Becquer the one Spaniard — excepting always Cervantes, of course — whose spirit is essentially attuned to the English, the Saxon, the Northern background. Unquestionably it is

this Flemish strain that sets Becquer apart from other Spanish writers of his time and lends his writings a quality that makes them of the world as well as of Spain.

It has been said that, were the hundred favorite poems of English compared with the hundred favorite poems of Spanish, the Spanish group would be found to take ten times the space and to contain one-tenth the poetry. If that be true, Becquer has nothing in common with Spanish poetry and much in common with English. He is not fundamentally Castilian in style. Instead of embroidering a lacery of sonorous words and magnificent phrases around some small and insignificant thought, Becquer wrote tersely and to the point. He knew the word to express his thought, used it and sped onward without bothering to put down words for the mere sake of creating lovely sounds, regardless of sense. And because he drove his words squarely at the heart of an idea clearly held, Becquer wrote scarcely a line of either poetry or prose that may be called second-rate. When it is considered that his works were published without revision or furbishing, the smooth and even beauty of his diction becomes amazing to contemplate. When are considered the conditions under which he must have written — racked with bodily weakness, poorly fed, always near the edge of abject poverty — the amazing becomes veritably marvelous. Becquer was a true genius, no less.

He has been accused of imitating Heine and De Musset. He would likely have been accused of imitating Poe, except that Becquer has not heretofore been well enough

known in English. The fact is that Becquer knew no German, a point on which all his biographers seem once in agreement; but he did read translations of Heine's poems, in which he became interested largely because one of his close friends had studied in Germany. That Becquer never imitated Heine is conclusively proved by his own lyrics where, out of seventy-six poems, one only can with some probability be ascribed to a Heinesque influence. Beyond that, it is true that Becquer, like Heine in the *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, strung his *Rimas* upon an autobiographical thread and numbered them in order, instead of naming each one. Yet, Becquer used Roman numerals where Heine used Arabic; and the Psalms had been thus numbered before either of them wrote a line of poetry.

The alleged imitations of Alfred de Musset rest upon equally sandy foundations, unworthy of consideration because the two poems involved are merely metaphoric-ally parallel in so slight a degree as might be expected in two poets whose natures had much in common. There is one conscious imitation, however, in the *Rimas*, where in one short lyric Becquer follows closely the famous Paolo and Francesca passage in Dante's *Inferno*, Canto V. And in that place Becquer owns, in the poem itself, his debt to Dante.

Becquer had his own genius, and needed no Heine, no De Musset, nor anybody else to imitate. He delved in the common mine with those others, assayed his nuggets of thought, fused them in the fire of his own genius, puri-

fied them in the flame of his spirit, and then coined imperishable poetic doubloons and pieces-of-eight where Heine stamped out sardonic marks, De Musset fashioned *louis d'or* and Poe minted double eagles. The metal is common to all, but the carat sign is individual to each.

Becquer doubtless invited comparison with poets foreign to Spain because himself was so unlike his contemporaries and his predecessors. Such comparisons would naturally tend to be hypercritical, and that state of mind can find imitation wherever the barest vestige of resemblance is traceable.

But so much for the poems of Becquer. He also wrote harmonious prose of the highest quality. Critical opinion has thus far centered upon his lyrics as the part of his work destined to live longest. In that case, some of his prose must be ranked as poetry, because it deserves to live. Of that some, his "Literary Letters to a Woman" (*Cartas Literarias á una Mujer*) come perhaps first. They tell in prose essentially the same story as is related from another facet in the "Lyrics" (*Rimas*), and tell it no less beautifully, no less vigorously, no less quickeningly. The Letters are not merely of the stuff which makes for immortality; they are the stuff which is immortal.

There are only four of the letters, each no longer than a lover might indite to his beloved one. In four short letters to an unnamed, apparently an unknown — maybe even a never-existent — woman, Becquer has written what no other writer seems ever to have succeeded in. Mérimée, in his bulky collection of "Lettres à une Inconnue,"

Hugo — all the great ones of earth whose love letters have seen the inky light of day — they all read as if composed with one eye on the lady and the other weeping for royalties lost in the act of writing for a private audience of one. Possibly Becquer did write his Letters for the cash they would bring. He was a consummate artist and capable of performing what he undertook. Yet the most careful searcher will vainly search through the *Cartas* for a thought, a word, a phrase, the turning of one idea to grate upon a sensitive soul.

To whom were they written? Nobody knows. They were published in magazines, the first Letter in December, 1860, when Becquer was not quite twenty-five, and the other three all within a short period afterward. Perhaps he wrote them to some woman who permitted their publication; perhaps published them because he dared not deliver them to their addressee and wanted her to read them anyhow; perhaps he wrote them merely because he felt them, for no particular eye and to no purpose beyond the creation of a masterpiece.

The fact is that Becquer wrote the *Cartas* and achieved the universal. In four brief Letters he has captured and written down in enduring words those vague hues and soft shadows of passionate love that most men, after all, scarcely apprehend even in fleeting thought. And beyond the beauty of his words Becquer adds that sting of genius which pricks the mind to perceive more than all words, however cunningly arrayed, can themselves convey.

These Letters have never before appeared in English

translation, so far as careful search has been able to show. Yet they contain little, if anything, calculated to baffle the careful reader. It must be that they have just escaped the eyes of translators. Most of Becquer's best stuff, in fact, particularly his prose, seems to have escaped translation into English; and what little of his has been Englished has rarely been of high quality in the translation. In truth, Becquer should lend himself excellently to English translation, because he wrote ideas chiefly and words secondarily, so that the translator's chief duty is to clothe his thoughts with suitable raiment in a new tongue. Becquer leaves small room for his basic thought to be misconstrued.

In presenting this volume as typical of Becquer, the Lyrics have naturally been selected as representing all but a handful of his poems, and the Letters as representing his prose at its best. Moreover, the two belong in pair, since the *Cartas* are the second movement, if not the first, in a symphony of beauty with the *Rimas*. And I have everywhere endeavored to preserve the spirit of Becquer and to prevent intrusion by the translator.

YOUNG ALLISON

April 1923

LITERARY LETTERS TO A WOMAN

(Cartas Literarias á una Mujer)

I

Once you asked me: "What is poetry?"

Do you remember? I know not in what connection I had just spoken of my passion for it.

"What is poetry?" you asked me; and I, who am not strong in the matter of definitions, answered you, hesitatingly, "Poetry is . . . is . . . " and without ending the sentence sought vainly in my memory some term of comparison, without succeeding in finding it.

You had leaned forward a little, the better to hear my words; the dark locks of your hair, shading your brow in that capricious artistry you so well know, fell from your forehead and flowed caressingly over your cheek, to rest upon your bosom; in your eyes, moist and blue as the sky at night, gleamed a point of light; and your lips were parted with a fragrant and gentle breathing.

My gaze, which from the confusion I felt had wandered for a moment without pausing anywhere, returned instinctively to your eyes, and I exclaimed all at once: "Poetry . . . poetry . . . you are poetry!"

Do you remember?

I still recall your expression of curiosity jested at, your tone of mingled anger and scorn when you said: "Do you

think my question only the child of a woman's vain curiosity? You are mistaken. I desire to know what poetry is because I desire to think as you think, to talk as you talk, to feel as you feel; to penetrate, in short, into that mysterious sanctuary where your soul at times takes refuge, whose threshold mine cannot cross."

Here our conversation was interrupted. You already know why. Several days have passed. Neither you nor I have renewed the subject, and yet for my part I have not left off thinking of it. You feel, doubtless, that the phrase with which I answered your question was nothing more than a gallant evasion.

Why not speak frankly? At that instant I gave that definition because I felt it, without even knowing whether I was uttering an extravagance.

Since then I have thought better of it, and do not hesitate to repeat it. You are poetry. You smile? So much the worse for us both. Your incredulity is going to cost us, you the task of reading a book and me that of writing it.

"A book!" you exclaim, growing pale and letting this letter fall from your hands. Be not frightened. You know full well: a book of mine cannot be very long. Erudite, I suspect not at all. Absurd, perhaps; but for you, with me writing it, I assume that it will not be — and for you I write it.

About poetry scarce any poet has said anything; but contrariwise sufficient paper has been spoiled by many who are not poets.

He who feels it becomes seized with a thought, molds it into form, brings it into the course of knowledge, and goes his way. The critics then launch themselves upon this form, examine it, dissect it, and believe they have understood it when they have completed its analysis.

Dissection may reveal the mechanism of the human body; but the phenomena of the soul, the secret of life — how are they to be studied in a cadaver?

Nevertheless, they have made rules for poetry, and filled an infinitude of volumes about it; it is taught in the universities, discussed in literary circles and explained in athaneums.

Do not wonder at that. A German savant has had the wit to reduce to notes, and enclose in the five lines of the stave, the mysterious language of the nightingales. I, if I have to tell the truth, am always unknowing what I am going to do; so it is that I cannot tell you beforehand.

Only I will tell you, to set you at ease, that I shall not overwhelm you with any deluge of terms that we might call scientific, nor shall I cite you authors whom I do not know, nor sentences in languages which neither of us understand.

Before now I have told you: I know nothing, I have studied nothing, I have read a little, felt somewhat and thought much, though whether well or ill I shall not attempt to say. As I shall say to you only what I have felt and thought, it will be enough for you to feel and think in order to understand me.

I suspect that I shall utter many heresies, historical,

philosophical, and literary. No matter. I do not pretend to teach anybody, or to put myself up as an authority, or to have my book declared a text.

I desire to speak to you a little of literature, even if only to satisfy a caprice of yours; I wish to tell you what I know by intuition, to give you my opinion and to have at least the pleasure of knowing that if we err, we err both — which, by the way, is equivalent, for us, to being certain.

You are poetry, I have told you, because poetry is emotion, and emotion is woman.

You are poetry because that vague aspiration for beauty, which is characteristic of woman — and which in man is a faculty of the brain — in you may be called an instinct.

You are poetry because feeling, which in us is an accidental phenomenon and passes like a breath of air, is so intimately joined to your specific organism that it constitutes a part of your self.

Finally, you are poetry because you are the focus from which its rays diverge.

True genius possesses some attributes that are extraordinary, which Balzac calls *feminine*, and in truth they are so.

In the scale of the poet's intellect are notes that pertain to the womanlike, and they are the ones which express tenderness, passion, and emotion. I do not know why poets and women do not understand each other better. Their manner of feeling has so many points of con-

tact. . . Perhaps for that reason. . . But let us leave off digressing and return to the subject.

We were saying . . . ah! yes; we were speaking of poetry.

In man, poetry is purely a quality of the spirit; it dwells in his soul, lives with the fleshless life of thought, and to be revealed it must be given a form. Therefore he writes it.

In woman, on the contrary, poetry is as if incarnate in her being; her aspirations, her emotions, her passions, and her destiny are poetry; she lives, breathes, moves in an indefinable atmosphere of idealism which emanates from herself, like a luminous and magnetic fluid. She is, in brief, the poetic word made flesh.

Nevertheless, woman is commonly accused of being prosaic. It is not strange: almost all that a woman thinks is poetry, but very little that she says. The reason I guess at, and you know.

Perhaps you have already recognized, vaguely and confusedly, what I have just said. Neither should it astonish you.

Poetry is to the wisdom of humanity what love is to the other passions.

Love is a mystery. All in it are phenomena that defy explanation; all is illogical; all is vagueness and absurdity.

Ambition, envy, avarice, all the other passions have their explanation and even their reason, except the one which fecundates emotion and nourishes it.

I, none the less, understand it; I understand it by means of an intense, confused, and inexplicable revelation.

Put aside this letter; close your eyes to the world about you; turn them toward your soul; give heed to the vague sounds that arise from it; and perhaps you will understand as I.

II

In my former letter I told you that you are poetry because you are the most beautiful personification of emotion, and the true spirit of poetry is nothing else.

Apropos of that the word *love* slipped from my pen in one of the paragraphs of my letter.

Of that paragraph I made the end. Nothing more natural.

I am going to tell you why.

There exists, even among persons who dedicate themselves to give form to what they think, a somewhat general misconception which, to my way of thinking, is without seeming so one of the greatest.

If we are to credit those who participate therein, it is a truth so undeniable that it may be elevated to the category of axiom, that thought never flows with such life and such precision as at the instant when it rises, like a vapor set free, and kindles the fancy and turns vibrant every sensitive fiber, as if touched by an electric spark.

I do not deny that it does happen thus. I deny nothing; but for my own part I can assure you that when I feel I

do not write. I keep, yes, written in my mind as in a mystic volume, the impressions that have left their trace in passing; those light and ardent daughters of emotion sleep, together in the depths of my memory, until the moment when, pure, tranquil, serene, and clothed, so to speak, with a supernatural power, my spirit evokes them, and they spread their transparent wings, which sound with a strange murmur, and pass before my eyes a second time, as in a luminous and magnificent vision.

Then I feel no longer with nerves that become agitated, with a breast that becomes oppressed, with the organic and material part of me that is moved by the rude shock of emotions produced by passion and desire; I feel, indeed, but in a manner that may be called artificial; I write, as he who copies a page already written; I paint, as the artist who reproduces the scene before his eyes, losing itself in the mist of the horizon.

All the world feels.

Only to some beings is given to keep, like a treasure, the memory fresh upon that which they have felt.

I believe they are the poets. What is more, I believe that is exactly why they are poets.

In truth, it is greater, more beautiful, to imagine genius drunk with emotions and inspirations, tracing with great flourishes, hand trembling with passion, eyes filled with tears or else profoundly moved with pity, those lines of poetry which later are the admiration of the world. But what do you wish? Truth is not always the most sublime.

Do you remember? Only a while ago I spoke to you on a similar matter.

When a poet paints his love for you in magnificent verses, doubt.

When he tells you in prose, and bad prose, believe.

There is a mechanical, small, and material part in all the works of man which primitive, true inspiration disdains in its glowing moments of ecstasy.

Without knowing how, I have wandered from the subject. As I have done so to gratify you, I hope your self-esteem will pardon me.

What better intermediary than this is there with a woman?

Be not angry. That is one of the many points of contact that you have with poets, or that they have with you.

I know, because I know, even though you have not said it, that you complain of me because in speaking of love I halted my pen, and ended my first letter as if wearied of the task.

Doubtless — and why deny it? — you thought that this fecund idea became sterile in my mind for lack of emotion.

Already I have shown you your error.

On writing it a world of confused ideas, numberless, trooped into my mind and hovered about my head like a fantastic round of chimerical visions. A dizziness clouded my eyes.

Write! Oh! if I could have written then I would not change with the first poet of the world.

But . . . then I thought it, and now I say it. If I feel what I feel to do what I do, how gigantic an ocean of light and of inspiration must have lashed in the minds of those men who have written what we all admire!

If you knew how the greatest thoughts grow little upon closing them in the iron band of speech; if you knew how diaphanous, how light, how impalpable are the golden vapors that float in the imagination while evolving those mysterious forms that it creates, of which we are able to reproduce only the fleshless skeleton; if you knew how faint is the thread of light that binds together the wildest thoughts that swim in its chaos; if you knew . . . but what do I say? You know it, you must know it.

Have you never dreamed?

On awakening have you found it possible to relate, with all its inexplicable vagueness and poetry, that which you dreamed?

The soul possesses a manner of feeling and of understanding that is especial; mysterious, because it is a mystery; stupendous, because it is infinite; divine, because its essence is holy.

How may speech, how may a gross and vulgar language, insufficient at times to express everyday necessities, be able to serve as a worthy medium between two souls?

Impossible.

None the less I shall endeavor to point out, as in the past, a few of the ideas that agitated me in that wondrous sleep, in which I viewed love surrounding humanity as in a fiery fluid, the passing of one age into another, sus-

taining the incomprehensible attraction of spirits — attraction like unto that of the stars — and revealing itself to the outer world by the medium of poetry, the only tongue that succeeds in stammering some of the phrases of its immense poem.

But you see? Perhaps already neither you understand me nor do I know what I say.

We talk as others do. We proceed with order. Order! I detest it, and yet it is so needful for all! . . .

Poetry is emotion; but emotion is no more than an effect, and all effects follow from some cause, more or less known.

What can it be? What can be the cause of this divine spur to enthusiasm, of this vague and melancholy aspiration of the soul, which is translated to the tongue of men through sweetest harmonies, unless it be love?

Yes; love is the never-failing source of all poetry, the fertile origin of all grandeur, the eternal beginning of all beauty; and I say love because religion, our religion above all, is also love, the most pure, the most beautiful and the only infinite love that is known; and only to these two stars of the intellect can man turn when he desires light to illumine his path, inspiration to refresh his barren and exhausted vein.

Love is the cause of emotion; but . . . what is love?

You see now, space is lacking. The subject is great, and . . . you smile? You believe that I am going to give a futile excuse for interrupting my letter here?

No; I shall not resort to the phenomena of myself to excuse myself for not speaking of love. I will confess to you frankly: I am afraid.

Some day, some day only, I swear to you I shall speak to you of love, at the risk of writing a million absurdities.

"Why do you tremble?" you doubtless say. "Do not they constantly speak of it who do not even know it? Why do you not speak, you who say you feel it?"

Ay! perhaps for the same reason that they, being ignorant of what it is, dare to define it . . .

You smile again?

Believe me, life is full of such paradoxes.

III

What is love?

In spite of the time that has passed, I believe that you must remember that to which I am about to refer. The date upon which it came to pass, although not recorded in history, will always be a memorable date for us.

Our acquaintance was only a few months' old; it was summer and we were at Cadiz. The warmth of the season allowed us to walk only at dawn, or during the night. One day . . . I speak ill, it was not yet day . . . the vague clarity of early dawn tinged the sky with a faint azure, the moon was vanishing in the West, enveloped in a violet mist, and afar off in the deepest distance of the sea the clouds were stained with red and gold as the breeze, precursor of light, rising from the ocean fresh and

impregnated with the marine perfume of the waves, caressed our brows in passing.

Nature was beginning then to awaken from her lethargy, with a dull murmur.

All about us was silence, in suspense and as if awaiting a mystic signal to burst forth in the gigantic anthem of rapture at awakening creation.

We, from the parapet of the strong wall that girds and defends the city and at whose feet break the groaning waves, were eagerly contemplating the solemn spectacle offered to our eyes.

The two of us kept a profound silence and yet both of us were thinking of the same thing.

You spoke my thought on asking me :

“What is the sun ?”

At that instant the star, whose disc was beginning to sparkle on the edge of the horizon, broke through the breast of the waters. Its rays spread over the immense plain of the ocean ; the sky, the waters and the earth were flooded with brightness and all things gleamed as if a sea of light had spilled upon the world.

On the crests of the waves, on the edges of the clouds, on the walls of the city, in the morning haze, over our heads, at our feet, everywhere glowed the pure light of the star, and there hung about us an atmosphere luminous and transparent, in which swam burning the atoms of the air.

Your words still ring in my ear. “What is the sun ?”

you asked me. "That," I answered, pointing to its disc which revolved darkly and banded with fire amid that atmosphere of diaphanous gold; and your eyes and your soul were filled with light, and in the indescribable expression of your face I knew that you had understood.

I did not know the scientific definition to answer your question; but at any odds at that moment I am certain it would not have satisfied you.

Definitions! To nothing have they been given so much as to indefinable things. The reason is very simple. None of them satisfies, none is exact, and therefore every one believes he has the right to formulate his own.

What is love? With this phrase I ended my letter of yesterday and with it began the one of today. Nothing would be easier for me than to answer, with the weight of an authority, this question that I have put to myself by telling you that it is the source of emotion. There are books full of definitions on this point. We have them in Greek and Arabic, in Chinese and Latin, in Coptic and Russian, as far as I know in all the tongues, dead or living, wise or ignorant, that are known. I have read some and have had others translated for me. After knowing nearly all of them I put my hand upon my heart, consulted my emotions, and could do no less than repeat with Hamlet, "Words, words, words!"

That is why I have thought it more to the point to remind you of a past occasion which has some analogy with our present discussion, and to tell you now as then:

"You wish to know what love is? Look you within yourself, and if it is true that you cherish it in your soul, feel it, and understand it, but do not ask me."

I can only say to you that it is the supreme law of the universe; mysterious law by which all is governed and directed, from the inanimate atom to the rational being; that from it leave and to it converge as to a center of irresistible attraction all our thoughts and actions; that it is, though hidden, at the basis of all things, and, as the effect of a primal cause — God — is in its turn the origin of those thousand unknown fancies which are all poetry, true and spontaneous, that woman cannot formulate but that she feels and understands better than we.

Yes. For poetry is nothing other than that aspiration, melancholy and vague, which stirs your spirit with the desire for an impossible perfection.

Poetry are those involuntary tears that tremble an instant on your lashes, slip silently down, glide away, and evaporate like perfume.

Poetry the sudden joy that illumines your features with a sweet smile, the hidden cause of which you do not know.

Poetry, in fine, are all those inexplicable phenomena which alter the soul of woman when emotion and passion are awakened.

Soft words that well from the heart, rise to the lips and die with scarce a sound, while the cheeks glow rosily! Strange murmurs of the night, that imitate the footsteps of the awaited lover! Sighing of the wind, feigning to be a beloved voice calling amidst the shadows! Confused

visions, which pass singing a song without rhythm or words, which the spirit alone perceives and comprehends! Warm exaltation of passion, which gives colors and form to the most abstract ideas! Incomprehensible presentiments, which illuminate the future as with a lightning flash! Limitless spaces which open before the eyes of the soul, avid of immensity, drag it to your bosom and sate it with infinity! Smiles, tears, sighs and desires, which form the mysterious retinue of love! Ye all are poetry, the true poetry, which can arouse an echo, engender an emotion or awaken a thought!

And all this inexhaustible treasure of emotion, all this animate poem of hopes and sacrifices, of dreams and sorrows, of joys and tears, whose every sensation is a verse and every passion a canto, all this is contained in your woman's heart.

A French writer has said, criticising an already celebrated musician, the composer of *Tannhäuser*:

"He is a man of talent who does his best to dissimulate it; but at times he cannot succeed and shows it in spite of himself."

Concerning the poetry of your souls the same may be said.

But what! You knit your brows and cast aside the letter? Bah! do not disturb yourself. . . . Know once and for always that, however you manifest yourselves, I believe and all others believe with me that woman is the poetry of the world.

IV

Love is poetry ; religion is love. Two things equal to a third are equal to each other.

This is the axiom that should save the task of writing a new letter. Notwithstanding, I know personally that this mathematical formula — and it seems such — can as well be a truth as a sophism.

Logic is able to break down reasonings that are not assailable but in spite of all do not convince. With such facility are precise deductions drawn from a false premise !

On the other hand, personal conviction is wont to convince, even though in the method of ratiocination there reign the greatest disorder. So irresistible is the voice of faith !

Religion is love, and because it is love it is poetry.

This is the theme that I propose to unwind today.

In treating so great a matter in so short a space and with such scanty knowledge as is at my disposal only one hope animates me. If believing is enough to persuade, I feel that which I write.

* * * * *

A long time ago — I did not know you then, and with this I excuse my saying that I had not yet loved — I perceived within myself an inexplicable phenomenon. I felt, I will not say an emptiness because, besides being vulgar, that is not the proper phrase ; I felt in my soul and in all my being as of a plenitude of life, as of an

inundation of spiritual activity which, finding no object on which to spend itself, upraised itself in the form of dreams and fantasies, in which it sought vainly for expansion, being within me as it was.

Close up and place on the fire a vial containing a liquid. The vapor, with violent boiling, rises from the bottom and struggles to issue forth, and falls back in little drops, and in turn rises again to fall again, until the vial that holds it compressed bursts into pieces. This is the secret of the early death of some women and of some poets, harps that burst ere anyone has drawn a melody from their golden strings.

That was the true condition of my spirit when there happened that which I am about to relate to you.

I was in Toledo; in Toledo, the city of somberness and melancholy above all. There every place recalls a history, every stone an age, every monument a civilization; histories, ages, and civilizations that have passed and whose actors perchance are now the dark dust which the wind whirls along as it whistles through the narrow and tortuous streets. None the less, by wonderful contrast, there where all seems dead, where only ruins are seen, where only broken columns and shattered capitals are stumbled over, mute ironies of man's mad ambition to perpetuate himself, I would say that the soul, overcome with fear and thirsty for immortality, seeks something eternal where to take refuge, and like the ship-wrecked sailor who clings to a spar, becomes tranquil in pondering upon its origin.

One day I entered the ancient convent of San Juan de los Reyes. I seated myself on a stone in its ruined cloister and set myself to sketching. The scene before my eyes was magnificent. Long, threadlike pillars supporting an arch, traced with thousands upon thousands of fanciful markings; narrow Gothic windows, latticed as small as the headdresses on images; rich canopies of granite with stone valances swelling through the design, affronting actuality itself; delicate creations of the chisel, appearing to wave with the breeze; statues garbed in long vestments, seeming to float as they walked; fantastic caprices, gnomes, hippogriffs, dragons, and serpents innumerable, which now appear at the crest of a capital, now range along the cornices, twine around the columns or creep drivelling up the trefoil garlands; balconies that are prolonged and lost to view, trees that bend their branches over a fountain, smiling flowers, merry birds forming contrast with the sad ruins and the silent naves, and finally the sky, a hand's-breadth of azure sky to be seen beyond the slate summits of the oriels, through the fretwork of a large rosette.

In your album you have my sketch; an anaemic, imperfect, trifling reproduction of that spot, but one that can give you some idea of its somber beauty. I shall not, then, endeavor to describe it to you in words, so often unavailing.

Seated, as I told you, on one of the broken stones, I worked all the morning, resumed my task in the afternoon and remained absorbed in my occupation until the light

began to fail. Then, leaving aside easel and paper, I flung a glance through the deeps of the solitary galleries and abandoned myself to my thoughts.

The sun had vanished. The profound silence of the ruins was disturbed only by the monotonous plashing of the fountain, the tremulous sighing of the wind in the cloisters and the fearful and confused murmur of the leaves, which seemed to speak among themselves in a low voice.

My desires began to boil and arise in a vapor of fancies. I sought at my side a woman, some one to whom I might tell what I felt. I was alone. Then I recalled this truth, which I had read I know not where: "Solitude is most wonderful . . . when there is some one beside you to whom to say so."

Scarce had I finished repeating this celebrated epigram when there seemed to be at my side, arising from amongst the shadows, an ideal form, covered by a floating robe and the brow circled with an aureole. It was one of the statues of the ruined cloister, a sculpture flung from its pedestal and fallen against the wall where I reclined, lying there covered with dust and half hidden in foliage, hard by the broken slab of a sepulcher and the capital of a pillar. Farther on, in the background, veiled in the shadows and the obscurity of the wide arches, other images could be faintly discerned: virgins with their palms and halos, monks with their staffs and hoods, hermits with their books and crosses, martyrs with their emblems and aureoles, a whole generation of granite,

silent and motionless, but in whose features the chisel had graven the mark of asceticism and an expression of ineffable serenity and beatitude.

"Here," I cried, "is a world of stone: inanimate phantoms of other beings who once lived and whose memory is bequeathed to coming epochs by a century of enthusiasm and of faith. Solitary virgins, austere monks, martyrs perforce, who, as I, lived without love or pleasure; who, as I, dragged out an obscure and miserable existence, alone with their thoughts, ardent heart inert under sackcloth, like a corpse in its tomb." I again fixed my eyes on those angular and expressive features; again I examined those forms — lifeless, tall, spiritual, and serene — and continued speaking: "Is it possible that ye have lived without passions, or fear, or hopes, or desires? Who has gleaned the emanations of love which, like an aroma, were emitted from your souls? Who has sated the thirst for tenderness that seared your breasts in youth? What spaces or bounds were opened to the eyes of your spirits, avid of immensity, at the awakening of emotion?" Night had fallen little by little. The dim light of dusk had yielded to a faint and azure brightness; the light of the moon which, concealed for a time by the opaque capitals of the tower, at that instant flooded the pillars of the deserted gallery with a silvery beam.

Then I observed that all those forms, whose long shadows fell upon the walls and upon the paving, whose floating garments seemed to move, in whose wasted features shone an indescribable expression of holy and

serene rapture, held their sightless eyes turned toward heaven, as if the sculptor had desired it to seem that their glances were lost in the infinite, seeking for God.

For God, eternal and ardent focus of beauty, to Whom turns its eyes, as to the pole of love, the soul's emotion.

END

LYRICS

(*Rimas*)

I

I know an anthem, mystic and tremendous,
Which in my soul's night heralds the morn,
And of this anthem are all these pages
Cadences on the air shadow-wards borne.

Fain would I write it, vanquishing the common
Rebellious idiom of human throats ;
Write it in words that were at the same time
Sighing and laughter, colors and notes.

Vain the essay : no characters are there
That can contain it ;— scarcely, O my own !
Clasping thy hands in my hands might I,
Hearing it, sing it to thee alone.

II

Arrow that flieth,
At random shot,
To fall to earth trembling
In some unknown spot ;

Leaf that the whirlwind
From dead tree doth tear,

To rest in some furrow,
Unknowing where ;

Wave that the sudden gale
Rouseth at sea,
Unknowing the strand
Where its end will be ;

Lights that in sconces
Burn high and low,
Not knowing which flame
Farthest will glow ;

Such am I, by chance
In the world, unknowing
Whence come I, nor whither
My steps are going.

III

Strange agitation
That flings up ideas,
As billows in tumult
When hurricane blows ;

Murmur within the soul
Rising and swelling,
As a muffled foretelling
Of volcanic throes ;

Silhouettes formless
Of beings impossible ;

Scenes that, as through a veil
Spectral beseem ;

Blending of colors,
In the air mimicking
Motes of the iris
That swim in the beam ;

Thoughts without words,
Words without reason ;
Harmonies rhythmless
That measureless sweep ;

Memories and longings
For things that never are ;
Kindlings of joyousness,
Urgings to weep ;

Buoyant activity
Lacking a goal to seek ;
Wing'd courser, guided
To no destination ;

Madness exalting,
Inflaming the spirit ;
Creator of genius,
Divine ebriation . . .

Such is Inspiration !

Great voice commanding
The chaos of brain ;
Voice that amidst the shades
Ordains the light ;

Bright golden curb
With power restraining
Of the exalted mind
The wing'd courser's flight ;

Thread of light binding
The thoughts together ;
Sun that, dispelling clouds,
To zenith whirls ;

Intelligent hand that
Succeeds in uniting
Unruly words into
A circlet of pearls ;

Harmonious rhythm that
With number and measure
Encloses the fugitive
Notes in the scale ;

Chisel that bites the block
Forming the statue,
And weds plastic beauty
Unto the ideal ;

Ether wherein ideas
Swing in good order,

As atoms that hidden
 Attraction doth bind;

 Torrent where fever
 Its hot thirst assuages;
 Oasis where the soul
 New strength doth find . . .
 Such is the Mind!

With both ever struggling,
 And victor o'er twain,
 Only genius to one yoke
 The two may enchain.

IV

Say not that, its treasure exhausted,
 The lyre is mute, lacking a melody:
 There may be no poets, but forever
 Poesy will be.

As long as the waves quiver glowingly
 At dawning's caress;
 As long as the sun doth, with fire and gold,
 The flying clouds dress;

As long as the breezes are laden with
 Fragrance and harmony;
 As long as the springtide comes to the earth,
 Poesy will be!

As long as by science the well of life
Has not been found,
And in seas or in heavens an abyss remains
That men cannot sound ;

While ignorant whither, but forward yet,
Goes humanity ;
As long as one mystery remains for man,
Poesy will be !

As long as the soul joys and yet no smile
Without doth appear ;
As long as there's sorrow when from the eye
There falls no tear ;

As long as mankind is still left with hope
And memory ;
As long as the heart and head battle still,
Poesy will be !

As long as eyes mirror the tender gaze
Of other eyes ;
As long as a sighing mouth still responds
To a mouth that sighs ;

As long as two souls in a kiss can feel
One unity ;
As long as one beautiful woman is . . .
Poesy will be !

V

Spirit, innominate,
Essence undefined,
I live the unshapen
Life of the mind.

In vast space I swim
In the sun's heat I quiver,
I float with the clouds,
Amid shadows I shiver.

I am the golden fringe
Girding the distant star;
I am the high moon's light,
Tranquil and pale.

I am the glowing cloud
Floating in western sky;
I am the meteor's
Luminous trail.

Snow on the mountain peaks,
Fire in the desert sands,
Blue wave at sea am I,
Froth on the strands.

Ivy mid ruins am I,
In the tomb fleeting flame,
Fragrance in violet;
In the lute, tone.

I roar in the torrent,
In windstorm I trumpet,
Strike blind in the lightning-flash;
In torments, groan.

I laugh in the upland hills,
Whisper amid tall grass,
Murmur in limpid streams;
In dry leaf, weep.

I float with the atoms
Of vapor uprising,
That mount slowly skyward
In vast spiral sweep.

In the thin golden webs
Spun by the insects,
Under the trees I swing
At restless ease.

I, amid coral growths
White-pearl-becarpeted,
Under the waves pursue
Light naiades;

Follow the naked nymphs
In the fresh, crystalline
Current of running brook
Sporting their leisure.

I, in the hollow caves
Whither no sunbeam comes,

Mingling among the gnomes
Gaze on their treasure.

I seek of ages gone
Traces obliterate;
Empires whose very names
Lost are, I know.

All of creation
My vision embraces;
I follow stars, spinning
In mad vertigo.

I know those regions
Where never a sound doth come,
Where worlds in embryo
Await life's leaven.

I am the crossing-bridge
Over the deep abyss;
I am the unknown stair
'Twixt earth and heaven.

I am the invisible
Ring that doth bind
To the ethereal world
The world we discern.

I am that spirit,
Ineffable essence,
Unknown attar, with
The poet for urn.

VI

Like to the breeze that touches blood
Upon the somber field of fray
And through the silences of night
Both harmonies and fragrance sows ;

Symbol of pain and tenderness —
In the English bard's direful play
Sweet Ophelia, bereft of reason,
Singing and strewing blossoms goes.

VII

In a shadowy nook of the chamber,
All covered with dust, and mute —
Forgotten, perhaps, by its master —
Was seen the lute.

What tones in its strings were sleeping,
As birds in the branches sleep,
Awaiting the master's snowy hand
Its chords to sweep !

How oft, I thought, thus sleepeth
In the soul's depths genius' worth,
Like Lazarus waiting for a voice
To say, "Come forth !"

VIII

When I behold in the distance vanish
The horizon blue,
As through a shimmering, nebulous haze
Of golden hue,
Possible it seems for me to flee the misery
That is my due
And float amid the golden mistiness
In atoms light
Like mist unto.

When, in the darkling recesses of heaven,
I see at night
The stars a-twinkle, as glowing, glimmering
Points of light,
Whither they shine it seems I can mount thither
In sudden flight
And bathe me in their beams, and burningly
Myself with them
In a kiss unite.

Even what I believe I know not, floating
In doubting's sea;
None the less I bear, these yearnings tell me,
Something divine
Here within me.

IX

Kissed by the zephyr that so softly sighs,
The light waves into ripples are caressed;
The sun kisses the cloud high in the skies
And tints it gold and purple in the West;
The flame that round the glowing tree-trunk plies
To kiss another flame itself doth twist;
Even the willow, by its own weight bowed o'er,
Doth a kiss, to the streamlet kissing it, restore.

X

The particles invisible of air
Around me quiver and vehemently glow;
The heavens burth forth in rays of golden light;
All earth doth tremble in a joyous throe.
Floating in waves of harmony I hear
A stir of kisses and of wings on high;
Mine eyelids close themselves . . . What passes now?
"Tis love goes by!"

XI

"I am dark-tinted and ardent as fire,
I am the symbol of fervency;
My heart runneth over with joyous desire.
Searchest thou for me?"—*No; not for thee.*
"Pale is my brow and golden my tresses;
Endless felicity I can bestow;

I guard a treasure of rare tendernesses.

Callest thou for me?"— *Not for thee; no.*

"I am a dream, I am an impossible

Fantasy hollow of luster and gloom;

I am impalpable, I am intangible;

I cannot love thee."— *Oh, come thou; come!*

XII

Mourn you, maiden, that your eyes

Green are as the seas?

Green the eyes Minerva had

And have the naiades;

And also green the storied orbs

Of the prophet's *houris*.

Green the forest's finery

In the springtime days;

Brilliant mid its seven hues

The rainbow green displays;

Verdant is the hue of hope,

And vert the emerald's rays;

Green the billows of the seas,

And green the poet's bays.

Your cheek is an early rose

O'erlain with frosty snow,

Wherein the petals' carmine

Through pearly hue doth show.

And yet I know

You mourn, because
You think your eyes
Uncomely flaws ;
Then think not so :
For, humid and green and dancing,
Your eyes resemble
Young leaves of the almond-tree
That in the breeze tremble.

Your ruby mouth an open
Crimson pomegranate,
Enticing one in summer
Therein the thirst to sate.

And yet I know
You mourn, because
You think your eyes
Uncomely flaws ;
Then think not so :
For, when you are stung to pique,
Your eyes gleam, flashing
Like waves upon the rocky shore
Of Cantabria dashing.

Your brow, with curling gold
In a broad riband decked,
Is a snowy peak whereon the day
Its last gleam doth reflect.

And yet I know
You mourn, because
You think your eyes

Uncomely flaws;
 Then think not so:
 For your eyes, 'neath your temples
 And ruddy lashes within,
 Seem gems of emerald and gold
 Upon white ermine skin.

XIII

Your eyes are blue, and when you laugh
 Their clearness doth recall to me
 The tremulous effulgence of the dawn
 Reflected in the sea.

*Your eyes are blue, and when you weep
 The drops in them, transparent, wet,
 To me resemble tears of early dew
 Upon a violet.*

Your eyes are blue; when in their deeps
 Some fancy gleams, as if afar
 A point of light, it seems in evening's sky
 I see a shooting star!

XIV

I saw thee once: and there before mine eyes
 The image of thine eyes doth ever run;
 Like to the dusky spot, berimmed with fire,
 That blinding floats when one beholds the sun.

No matter whither I may turn my gaze,
Always do I behold thy pupils' flare;
But never do I see thee — 'tis but thy glance:
Just eyes, thine eyes — nothing more is there.

Fitful and fantastical, their gleaming
There in my chamber's corner is descried;
Even while I am sleeping do I feel them
Hovering o'er me, ever open wide.

I know that there are will-o'-the-wisps that lead
The nighting traveler to his death to go:
I feel myself drawn onward by thine eyes,
But whither they draw me — that I do not know.

XV

Floating wreath of hazy misting,
Rippling froth in white tongue twisting,
Resonance bold
Of a harp of gold,
Kiss of the zephyr, billow of light:
Such are you.

You, airy shadow, who, when I endeavor
Only to touch you, disappear ever
Like unto flame, like unto sound,
Like unto mist, like the murmur profound
Of the lake blue.

Sounding wave in a shoreless sea,
In space a comet wandering free,
Lamenting deep
Of the hoarse wind's sweep,
Endless desire for a greater height :
Such am I.

I, who to your eyes in agony's burning
Mine eyes by day and by night am turning ;
I, who untiringly run, and wild,
After a shadow, the ardent child
Of a fantasy !

XVI

If, at the rustling of the bluebell blossoms
On thy balcony,
Thou dost believe that, sighing, the murm'ring zephyr
Doth pass by,
Know that, concealed amid the leafy verdure,
Sighing am I.

If, at a faint sound whispering by thy shoulder
Scarce audibly,
Thou dost believe upon thy name a distant
Voice doth cry,
Know that, amid the shadows that surround thee,
Calling am I.

If, in the stilly night, thy heart doth quiver
Timorously,
Feeling the presence of a burning breath
To thy lips nigh,
Know that, however invisible, at thy side
Breathing am I.

XVII

Today the earth and the heavens both smile upon me ;
Today to my soul's depths reaches the sun's warm ray ;
Today I beheld her . . . beheld, and she gazed on me . . .
I believe in God, today !

XVIII

Her breath coming short,
Cheeks glowing, fatigued with the ball,
Leaning upon my arm
She paused at the end of the hall.

In the light gauze
Stirred by her palpitant bosom
Swayed there, in rhythm
Measured and sweet, a blossom.

As in a pearly cradle
That, wafted, through wavelets slips,
Mayhap there it slumbered
In the breath of her half-opened lips.

Ah, who would not — I thought —
 Thus let time onward sweep?
 Ah, if the flow'rets slumber
 How 'sweet their sleep!

XIX

When thou inclinest, melancholy,
 Thy head upon thy breast,
 To me a severed white lily
 Is manifest.

When purity, as the bloom betokens,
 God on thee did bestow,
 He made thee as He made the lily —
 Of gold and snow.

XX

If sometime thy ruby lips are seared
 By an invisible burning breath, then know
 That the soul which with the eyes is able to speak
 Can also with a glance a kiss bestow.

XXI

"What is poesy?" you ask me, gazing
 Into mine eyes with your eyes blue.
 What is poesy? And do you truly ask me?
 Poesy . . . are you.

XXII

How lives that rose thou hast imprisoned
There next thy bosom ?
Never till now have I seen upon earth
O'er the volcano the blossom.

XXIII

For a glance, a world ;
For a smile, heaven's bliss ;
For a kiss . . . I know not
What I'd give thee for a kiss !

XXIV

Two red tongues of fire
That, twined round the same
Trunk, draw near and, kissing,
Form only one flame ;

Two tones, from the lute
Struck at once by the hand,
That encounter in space
And harmoniously band ;

Two waves, to a strand
Come together to rest,
That, breaking, are crowned
With one silvery crest ;

Two wreathings of vapor
 That rise from the lake
 And, in the sky joining,
 One single cloud make;

Two thoughts at once bursting,
 Two kisses that touch,
 Two echoes that mingle . . .
 Our two souls are such.

XXV

When, in the night, enfold thee
 The tulle wings of sleep,
 And thy lowered lashes
 In ebon arches sweep;
 To listen to the throbbing
 Of thine unquiet breast,
 And have thy head, while sleeping,
 Upon my bosom rest:
 Of what I have
 I would give aught —
 Light, and air,
 And thought!

When some viewless object
 Thy gaze contemplates,
 And the reflection of a smile
 Thy lips illuminates;
 To read upon thy forehead

The thought that silently
Passes, like a cloud upon
The mirror of the sea :
All I desire
I would disclaim —
Gold, glory,
Genius, fame !

When thy tongue is silent,
And thy breath faster flows,
And thy cheeks turn ruddy,
And thy dark eyes half-close ;
To see beneath thy lashes,
Glist'ning with humid fire,
The ardent spark that leaps from
The forges of desire :
I would give all
I hope for, even —
Faith, and spirit,
Earth, heaven !

XXVI

It is against mine interest to confess it,
But I, belov'd, with thee
Agree that an ode hath little worth, unless it
Is good for a bank-cheque — and endorsed to me.
There will not lack some nincompoop who, hearing,
Will cross himself and say :
“Woman, the nineteenth century's ending nearing,

Material and prosaic. . .” What foolish bray!
 Voices that make four poets run, who tight
 Wrap them in lyrics on a winter’s day!
 Baying of hounds in the moon’s light!
 In this life thou well knowest, as know I,
 With genius ’tis most counted who doth *write*,
 With gold, ’tis whoso *maketh*, poetry.

XXVII

Awake, I tremble to behold thee,
 But I am bold to gaze on thee, asleep;
 So, spirit of my spirit, whilst thou slumb’rest
 My watch o’er thee I keep.

Awake, thou laughest, and thy restless lips,
 Laughing, seem even
 Flashes of curved lightning wandering, crimson,
 Over a snowy heaven.

Asleep, the corners of thy mouth
 In a light smile upcreep,
 Soft as the luminous aftertrail
 Left by a dying sun . . .
 — Sleep!

Awake, thou gazest, and thy humid eyes
 Resemble, gazing,
 The blue sea-wave, upon whose crest
 The sun strikes, blazing.

Asleep, a tranquil radiance doth
From out thine eyelids sweep,
As rays of mellow light pour forth
From a crystal lantern . . .
— Sleep!

Awake, thou speakest, and thy spoken words,
Vibrating, seem
Showers of pearls that in a golden basin
Torrential stream.

Asleep, in the murmur of thy breathing,
Measured and deep,
I hear a poem which my enamored soul
Understands fully . . .
— Sleep!

Over my heart have I placed my hand,
That may not sound
Its beating in the night, disturbing
The calm profound.

Already at thy balcony have I drawn
The curtains, to keep
Without the dawning's wearying splendor,
Lest it awake thee . . .
— Sleep!

XXVIII

When, amid the shades of vespers,
Murmuring a faint voice whispers,
Troubling the calm solemnity;
If at bottom of my spirit
Sweetly resonant I hear it —

Tell me: is it the wind, crying,
Passes, or that thine own sighing
Breathes of love in drifting by?

When the sun gleams red and clearly
In my window-mornings early,
And my love evokes thy vision;
If I seem to feel the impression
Of another mouth on mine —

Tell me: is it madness nighing,
Or that thy heart in its sighing
Sends to me a kiss of thine?

If, in the luminous day and bright
And in the somber depths of night;
If in all around me lying
(Who so deeply thee desire)
Thee I seem to feel and see —

Tell me: is it I respire
Dreaming, or that in thy sighing
Thy breath to drink thou givest me?

XXIX

She held the volume open
 Upon her dress;
 Against my cheek was brushing
 One raven tress;
 The letters there before us,
 Not one was seen —
 But a great silence reigned
 Us two between.
 How long? . . . Not even then
 Could it be known;
 Naught do I know, save there
 Was heard, alone,
 The breath from dry lips rushing.
 And I know this:
 We turned at once . . . eyes met . . .
 Sounded a kiss.

*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*

The book was Dante's work,
 It was his *Hell*.
 All tremulous, I said
 When our eyes fell:
 "Seest now a poem can
 In one verse be?"
 And she, enkindled, answered:
 "Yea, I see!"

XXX

A tear rose in her eyes ; a phrase
 Of pardon to my lips. Spoke pride,
 And straightaway her sobs were stilled
 And on my lips the soft words died.

I go one road and she another ;
 But, thinking on our love so deep,
 I say, "Why spoke I not that day?"
 And she'll say, "Why did I not weep?"

XXXI

Our love was a tragic farce
 In whose absurd motif
 The mingled grave and comic
 Brought forth both joy and grief.

But the worst of the story was
 That, after the play was done,
 To her fell tears and laughter,
 And to me, tears alone !

XXXII

Wrapped in her beauty she passed slowly by :
 Not even her to see
 Did I turn me ; none the less a something
 Murmured within mine ear : "*Tis she.*"

Who joined the even to the morn? I know not:

I know — whate'er the cause —

Only that in a summer night's brief span

The twilights were united, and . . . "*it was.*"

XXXIII

'Tis a case of words, yet thou wilt not,

No more than I,

After the past, agree in whom

The fault doth lie.

Pity love hath no lexicon,

Wherein to see

When pride is merely pride, and when

'Tis dignity!

XXXIV

Noiseless she passes, and her motions are

Still harmonies;

Let her steps sound and, sounding, they recall

Of fluttering wings the rhythmic cadences.

Her eyes, half-opened, are as clear as day;

Both earth and skies,

However far embraced within her gaze,

With a new light shine forth before her eyes.

She laughs, and of rippling water her laughter

The notes doth bear;

She weeps, and a poem of infinite pity
Is every tear.

And she has light, and color, and perfume,
And line has she;
And form, engenderer of desires; expression,
The everlasting fount of poesy.

But she is stupid? . . . Bah! While, silent, she keeps
The secret, alway
To me what she holds silent will be worth
More than all that anyone else may say.

XXXV

Thine unconcern I hold in small esteem!
Although, one day, much more I relished thine
Affection; for that which in me is worth
Something, that . . . thou couldst not even divine!

XXXVI

If we of all our quarrels, in a book,
The story were to trace,
And in thy soul and mine, as in its leaves,
As much were to erase;

Such is my love, though thy love left so deep
A spoor within my breast,
That only wherewith thou wouldst erase one mark
I would erase the rest!

XXXVII

Before thou diest I shall die : already
 Deep in my breast the blade
Of steel I bear, wherewith thy hand the gaping
 Mortal wound hath made.

Before thou diest I shall die : my spirit,
 Firm in its constancy,
Seating itself before the gates of death
 There will wait for thee.

With hours the days, and with the days the years
 Will pass, and at that door
Thyself shalt at the last appear, to knock . . .
 Who may that knock ignore ?

Then, when earth retaineth all thy guilt
 And thy spoils' burden,
Washing thee in the cleansing flood of death
 As in another Jordan ;

There, where the murmur of this life doth go
 Trembling to die,
Like to the wave that cometh to a strand
 To expire silently ;

There, where the sepulcher that closeth doth
 Open on eternal day . . .
All that we two have silent kept between us
 We have to say !

XXXVIII

Sighs are air, and go to the air.
 Tears are water, and to the sea flow.
 Tell me, woman: when love's forgot,
 Knowest where it doth go?

XXXIX

Why tell me so? I know it: she is fickle,
 Capricious, she is arrogant and vain;
 Before true feeling from her heart would spring,
 Water would gush forth from the sterile plain.
 I know there is no fiber that responds
 To love within her heart, a serpent's lair;
 That she is an inanimate statue . . . but . . .
 She is so fair!

XL

Her hand within my hands,
 Her eyes upon mine eyes,
 Her head upon my shoulder
 Amorously reclining,
 God knows how many times
 With idle step and slow
 Together we have wandered
 Below the lofty elms
 That mystery lend, and shadow,
 Unto her portico.

And yesterday — scarce a year
Had, like a breath, gone by —
With what excelling grace,
What exquisite aplomb,
She said, when an officious
Friend presented us:
“I think that I have seen you,
Somewhere, before.”

Ah, fools

Who frequent the *salons*,
Ye dowagers genteel,
And you go forth in chase
Of delicate imbroglios!
What a story ye have lost!
And what a savory morsel
That might have been devoured
Sotto voce, in a chorus,
Behind the gold, plumed fan!

* * * * *

O chaste moon and discreet,
Ye high and tufted elms,
Ye walls about her dwelling,
Ye shadows of her portico,
Keep silence! that the secret
May not escape from you!
Keep silence! As for me,
I have forgotten all:
And she . . . she . . . there's no mask
Such as her countenance!

XLI

Thou wert the hurricane; I the lofty tower
 That did defy its power:
 Needs must thou spend thyself or shiver me! . . .
 It could not be!

Thou wert the ocean, and I the massive rock
 That did withstand its shock:
 Needs must thou break thyself or shatter me! . . .
 It could not be!

Thou fair, I proud; one wont to win the field,
 The other not to yield:
 Narrow the path, the clash a certainty . . .
 It could not be!

XLII

When I was told I felt the cold
 Of a steel blade in my breast.
 For a space I knew not where I was —
 Upon the wall for prop I pressed
 Mine arm. Night fell upon my spirit;
 With wrath and pity my soul did fill . . .
 And then I fathomed why men weep!
 And then I fathomed why men kill!
 Some halting words I stammered out . . .
 The cloud of sorrow drifted on . . .
 Who brought the news? . . . A faithful friend . . .
 I thanked him for the favor done.

XLIII

I put the lamp aside, and on the edge
Of the tumbled bed I let my body fall —
Speechless and bitter, with unwinking eye
Clapped fast on the wall.
How long remained I thus? I know not: when
The horrible drunkenness of grief was gone
The lamp was dying, and upon my balcony
Smiling the sun shone.
Nor know I, in those terrible hours, on what
I thought, nor what chimeras did unfold
Before me; only I know that I blasphemed
And wept, and in that night that I grew old.

XLIV

As in an open book I read
To the furthest bottom of thine eyes;
Wherefore feign, then, with the lip
Laughter that the eye belies?
Weep! 'Tis no shame to avow
That thou didst somewhat love me;
Weep! None sees us. Look: I am
A man . . . and I weep also — see!

XLV

Upon the keystone of the arch
 Whose time-worn stones with red were blent,
 Work of a chisel rude, was seen
 The Gothic blazonment.

Crest of its granite helm, the stone
 That hung behind the carven part
 Shadow'd the shield, whereon a hand
 Held fast unto a heart.

To view it in the lonely place
 We two forbore to rove:
 And "'tis"—she said—"the perfect sign
 Of my constant love."

Ay! It is true, what she said then:
 Her heart . . . 'tis so
 She bears it in her hand . . . or anywhere . . .
 But in her bosom, no.

XLVI

She wounded me, hiding herself in the shadows,
 With a kiss sealing her treachery.
 Arms around my neck, from out my back
 Coldly she plucked my heart away.
 And lightly doth she pursue her course;
 Happy, smiling, bold — and why?
 Because from the wound there flows no blood . . .
 Because the dead on foot doth stay!

XLVII

I have been bewildered by the deepest chasms
Of earth and skies,
And I have plumbed their bottoms with my thoughts
Or with mine eyes.

But, ay! to a heart's abyss I came, and leaned
To see — alack!
My soul and mine eyes dumfounded were:
So deep . . . so black!

XLVIII

Forth from my breast her love I drew,
As from a wound the steel is drawn,
Although I felt that with the drawing
My life were gone.

I cast her image from the altar
Raised to her in this soul of mine;
And the light of faith went out before
Her empty shrine.

Yet, to combat my firm decision,
With visions of her my mind doth teem . . .
When I shall slumber with such dreaming,
What good to dream!

XLIX

Sometimes I meet her in the world,
 She passes close to me
 And passes smiling, and I say:
 “Howbeit, then, laughs she?”
 To my lips, then, another smile
 Doth rise, of grief the screen;
 And comes the thought: “She laughs, perhaps,
 As I myself laugh, e’en!”

L

As the savage fashions with rude hand
 From a log, at his caprice, a deity,
 And then bows down before his handiwork:
 So did you and I.

Real form we gave unto a fantasy,
 Ridiculous invention of the brain;
 And, once the idol made, we sacrificed
 Our love before its fane.

LI

Of the little of life to me remaining
 I would give the best years willingly
 To know what to others
 Thou hast said of me.

And this mortal life . . . and of the eternal
What may be mine — if any there be —
To know what, alone,
Thou hast thought of me.

LII

Ye billows gigantic that bellowing pound
Upon the remotest, most desolate strand,
In your foamy mantle caparison'd:
Bear me with ye!

Ye hurricane blasts that rushing beat down
The withered leaves in the deep forest-domain,
Caught in your turbulent vortex and blown:
Bear me with ye!

Thou rack of the tempest, by lightning-bolt rended,
Thine edges befringed with its fiery flash branded,
Swathed amid mist and by darkness surrounded:
Bear me with thee!

Bear me, for pity, where vertigo's spin
Both reason and memory at once will dethrone . . .
Ay, bear me, for pity! . . . I fear to remain
Alone with my grief!

LIII

Dusky swallows again will come
Upon thy balcony their nests to swing,
And tap their wings upon thy window-panes
In playful fluttering;

But those which slackened in their flight,
Thy beauty and my fortune their concern;
Those which even came to know our names . . .
Those . . . will ne'er return!

Twining honeysuckle will come
Again thy garden wall to clamber o'er,
And spread again upon the air its blossoms,
Fairer than all before;

But those, bediamonded with dew,
Whose drops we two were wont to watch aquiver
And fall, as they were tears of limpid morning . . .
Those . . . will come back never!

Burning words of love will come
Again full oft within thine ears to sound;
Perchance thy heart will even be aroused
From its sleep profound;

But mute and prostrate and absorbed,
As God is worshipped in His holy fane,
As I have loved thee . . . undeceive thyself:
Thou wilt not be thus loved again!

LIV

When of the past the fleeting hours
We again recall,
Trembling beneath her ebon lashes gleams
A tear belike to fall.

And at last, like a drop of dew, it falls
And glides away
On thinking that, as now for yesterday,
We two shall sigh tomorrow for today.

LV

Caressing mine ear amid the orgy's
Discordant outcry,
There came, like a note of distant music,
The echo of a sigh.

The echo of a sigh that I know well ;
A breath that I have quaffed did it compose ;
Perfume of flow'r that in a somber cloister
Obscurely grows.

My darling for the day, affectionately,
Asked me : "What thoughts are thine ?"
"*Why, none . . .*" "None, and thou weepest ?" "*It*
is only
A joyous bitterness, and bitter wine."

LVI

Today as yesterday, tomorrow as today,
And all as one !
A sky of gray, horizon everlasting,
And on . . . and on !

The heart, belike a dull machine, pulsing
 In measured sweep;
 The torpid intellect within a corner
 Of the brain, asleep.

The soul, though coveting a paradise,
 Faithless exploring;
 Fatigue without object, wave that rushes
 The wherefore ignoring.

Voice that, incessant, on the same tone sings
 The selfsame strain;
 Drop of water that monotonously falls,
 Falls, falls again.

Thus do the days uncoil, and after each
 Doth come its morrow;
 Today as yesterday . . . and all with neither
 Joy nor sorrow.

Ay! memory doth at times the ancient woe,
 Sighing, retrieve . . .
 Bitter, in truth, is sorrow, yet notwithstanding
 To suffer is to live!

LVII

This paltry frame of skin and bones,
 After it has briskly strolled,
 Finds itself tired — nor is it strange;
 For, though 'tis true I am not old,

Such part of life as has been mine
I have made use of such a way,
In my despite, I'd swear I have
Condensed a century in each day.

So, should I die today, that I
Have not lived I could not hold ;
Like a smock that from without looks new,
I know within it has grown old.

Ay, damn my star ! grown old !— so says
My gnawing sorrow plainly now ;
There's pain that bites its horrid mark
Deep in the heart, if not the brow.

LVIII

Wouldst thou, of this delicious nectar,
Avoid the bitter lee ?
Then breathe of it, bring it to thy lips nigh,
And let it be.

Wouldst thou that we of this love retain
A dulcet memory ?
Then let us love much today, and tomorrow
Let us say *good-bye!*

LIX

I know what the object
Is of all thy sighs ;
Of thy sweet and secret languor

The cause I recognize.
 Thou smilest? . . . Some day, maiden,
 Thou too wilt know why:
 Perhaps thou dost suspect it,
 But I know — I.

I know what thou dreamest,
 What thou in dreams dost see;
 As in a book, upon thy brow I read
 What thou say'st not to me.
 Thou smilest? . . . Some day, maiden,
 Thou too wilt know why:
 Perhaps thou dost suspect it,
 But I know — I.

I know why at one time
 Thou laughest and dost weep;
 Of thy woman's soul do I penetrate
 Into the mysteries deep.
 Thou smilest? . . . Some day, maiden,
 Thou too wilt know why:
 Whilst thou dost feel much and know naught,
 I, who feel no longer . . . all know I!

LX

My life, it is a sterile place:
 The flow'r I touch straightway decays;
 Along my fatal pathway goes
 Someone who ever evil sows
 For me to gather in apace.

LXI

To watch the sleepless hours
Of fever pass from me
Slowly, at my bedside
Who will seated be?

When my hand steals forth
Trembling, at my last gasp,
Seeking a friendly hand,
Whose, then, will it clasp?

When death of my pupils
The crystal vitrifies,
Still mine eyelids open,
Who will close mine eyes?

When the bell sounds for me,
(If there sound a bell),
Who a prayer will murmur
Hearing my funeral knell?

When my pallid clay
The heavy earth doth keep,
O'er the forgotten sepulcher
Who will come to weep?

Who, on a later day
When the sun shines again,
That which I was on earth —
Who will remember then?

LXII

First is a whiteness, tremulous and hazy,
 Ray of light dancing and tinting the sea ;
 All at once it sparkles, growing and dilating
 Into ruddy clearness, a burst of radiancy.

The radiant-gleaming light is happiness ;
 The dreadful shadow, it is misery ;
 Ay ! in the darksome night of my spirit
 When will the dawning be ?

LXIII

Like to a swarm of angered bees,
 Forth from a cranny of memory
 Sally to beset me the recollections
 Of hours gone by.

Fain would I flee them. Vain the endeavor !
 They circle me and sting ;
 And one by one keep coming on to goad me
 The toothed barbs of the soul's envenoming.

LXIV

As does the miser guard his treasure
 Did I guard my *dolor* :
 I sought to prove that something is eternal
 Upon which her eternal love she swore.

But now I call in vain upon that sorrow,
Only to hear it say
As it evades me: "Wretched one, thou canst not
Even hope to suffer for ever and aye!"

LXV

Came night, and I no haven had found;
I thirsted! . . . Mine own tears drank I;
Hunger seized me! My swollen eyes
I closed for to die!

I was in a desert! Though to mine ears
Came the din of the crowds' activity,
I was an orphan, and poor! . . . The world
Was empty . . . for me!

LXVI

Whence do I come? . . . Seek out the harshest,
Most dreadful of ways:
Upon the flinty rock the crimson trail
Of torn feet bleeding;
The shreds of a passing soul that the keen-spiked
Thorn-brake frays,
Will tell the road
To my cradle leading.

Whither I go? . . . The saddest, most somber
Of deserts cross:
Vale of eternal snows, and of eternal

Misting and gloom;
 Where is a lonely stone, without inscription
 Beneath its moss;
 Where dwells oblivion . . .
 There will be my tomb.

LXVII

What rare delight to see the day,
 Crowned with fire, begin to show,
 And at its kiss of light
 The waves agleam, the air aglow!

What rare delight in autumn sad,
 After the rain, in the evening hours,
 To breathe unto repletion
 The fragrance of the rain-wet flow'rs!

What rare delight, when silently
 Falls in flakes the winter snow,
 To see the restless flames
 In red tongues flicker to and fro!

What rare delight, when one is sleepy,
 To sleep . . . and snore like a baritone . . .
 And eat . . . and gorge! . . . and what a pity 'tis,
 'Tis not enough, alone!

LXVIII

I know not what I dreamed of
During the night just past ;
Sad, most sad, must the dream have been,
For, wakened, its anguish still did last.

I saw, upon arising,
The pillow still was moist ;
And felt for the first time, perceiving it,
That my soul with bitterness rejoiced.

How sad a thing is slumber
When weeping interferes ;
Yet I have gladness with my grief . . .
I know that still are left my tears !

LXIX

We are born with a lightning-bolt's first gleaming,
And still its gleam endures at our expiring :
Such is life's brevity !

The glory and the love of our desiring
Are shadows that we follow in our dreaming :
To waken is to die !

LXX

How often, at the mossy foot
Of her guardian walls,
I heard at midnight the little bell
That to matins calls !

How often did the silvered moon
 My sad shadow trace
 By that of the cypress-tree that looks
 Out from her garden-place!

When in shadow the church lay wrapped
 How often I saw march
 The rays of her lamp upon the stones
 Of its fretted, pointed arch!

Although about the tower's dim eaves
 The winds a-whistling were,
 I heard, amid the chorus notes,
 Her vibrant voice and clear.

On wintry nights, if through the square
 Some timorous passer-by
 Should dare the way, he'd hasten when
 My form he would descry.

And there lacked not an ancient dame
 To spread the story droll
 That of some sexton dead in sin
 I was perhaps the soul.

No inch of vestibule or court
 But I knew in the dark;
 The herbs that grow there still retain,
 Perhaps, my footsteps' mark.

The frightened owls, which followed me
 With their eyes of flame,

In time as on a comrade soul
To look upon me came.

The crawling creatures at my side
Moved ever fearlessly;
Even the voiceless granite saints,
I saw, saluted me!

LXXI

I slept not: roving in that realm
Wherein all objects change, nor keep
Their shapes; strange spaces that divide
Vigil from sleep.

The thoughts, that in a silent round
Passed and repassed within my mind,
By little to a slower measure
Their dance confin'd.

Mine eyelids veiled the light that comes
Into the spirit through the eyes;
An inner light illumed the world
Of fantasies.

At that point came unto mine ear
A sound, confused and vague, as when
The temple faithful end their prayers
With an *amen*.

And was a sorrowing voice afar
Calling my name; a redolence

Of tapers snuffed, of dankness, and
Of frankincense.

* * * * *
* * * * *

Came night, and in forgetfulness'
Bosom deep I fell as lead.
I slept; and, waking, cried: "Someone
I loved is dead!"

LXXII

FIRST VOICE

"The wavelets hold vague harmony,
Sweet fragrance holds the violet,
The frosty night, rime silvery;
Light, the day, and gold;
I something better yet:
Love I hold!"

SECOND VOICE

"Nebulous radiancy, zephyr of praise;
Billow of envy, kissing the feet;
Island of visions, wherein stays
The soul in bliss:
Ecstasy sweet
Glory is!"

THIRD VOICE

"Treasure, an ember growing cold;
Vanity, shadow that soon is through;

All, all is false — glory, gold.

What cherish I

Only is true:

Liberty!"

Thus did the boatmen pass, their song

Eternal singing;

The sun's rays blazing upon the spray

From oar-stroke springing.

"Wilt ride?" they called; and smiling I said

As they went by:

"'Tis time I did; yet my clothes are still

On the sand, to dry."

LXXIII

They closed her eyes

Which still were open;

With a white linen

They covered her face;

And some of them sobbing,

Others in silence,

From the sad alcove

They all went forth.

The light, on the floor,

Gleamed from a basin,

Upon the wall casting

The bed's silhouette;

And amid all that shadow

There sprang forth at intervals,
 Outlined and rigid,
 The form of the corpse.

Awakened the day,
 And at its first dawning
 With myriad noises
 The city awoke.
 Before that contrasting
 Of life and of mysteries,
 Of light and of darkness,
 I pondered a moment:

*Lord God, how lonely
 Are left the dead!*

From the house, on their shoulders,
 To the temple they bore her,
 And there in a chapel
 They put down the bier.
 There they surrounded
 Her body so pallid
 With candles of yellow
 And cerements black.

As the bell sounded
 The last stroke of vespers
 An old woman ended
 Her final devotions;
 She crossed the wide nave,
 The doors gave a groaning,

And the holy recess
Deserted was left.

Of a clock was heard
The regular ticking,
Along with the sputtering
Of waxen candles.
So sad and so dreadful,
So dark and so changeless
Was all there about me . . .
I thought for a moment:
*Lord God, how lonely
Are left the dead!*

The high church bell
With iron tongue swinging
Gave her, vibrating,
Its sad farewell.
In mournful garments
Her friends and her kindred
Crossed in procession,
Forming the cortege.

Of the last abode,
Obscure and narrow,
The mattock opened
A niche at one end.
There they entombed her
And walled her in straightway,

And, the rite ended,
Grief was dismissed.

With pick upon shoulder
The sepulcher-keeper,
Between his teeth humming,
Went off in the distance.
Night was approaching,
Silence was reigning;
Lost in the shadows
I pondered a moment:
*Lord God, how lonely
Are left the dead!*

In the long nights
Of the frigid winter,
When all the rafters
Shake in the wind
And the fierce tempest
Lashes the windows,
Alone am I, thinking
Of the poor maiden.

There falls the rain
With a sound eternal;
There struggles with it
The north wind's blast.
Immured in that humid
Hole in the wall,

Perhaps her bones
Are frozen with cold! . . .

Returns dust to dust?
Does the soul mount to heaven?
Is all, then, vile matter,
Mould and corruption?
I know not; but something
I cannot explain,
That alike engenders
Repugnance and grief,
Is leaving so lonely,
So sad, the dead!

LXXIV

Their garments loosely floating,
Their swords from scabbards bared,
Upon the golden lintel of the gateway
Two seraphim kept guard.

Close to the bars defending
The portal, by the light
Come through the double gratings at the end,
I saw her, dimly white.

I saw her as a vision
That passes in sweet dreams;
Like to a ray of light, diffuse and thin,
That 'twixt two shadows gleams.

As with an ardent longing
 I felt my soul imbrue:
 As an abyss attracts, so to itself
 That mystery me drew!

But, ay! they seemed to tell me
 The glances of the angels at that door:
 "The threshold of this portal
 God only may cross o'er!"

LXXV

Can it be true that, when sleep lays
 Her rosy fingers on our eyes,
 The soul in sudden flight abandons
 The cell it occupies?

Can it be true that, guest of the mists,
 It mounts to empty regions — fleet
 And wing'd on the gentle breeze of night —
 Other souls to meet?

And there, denude of human form
 And loosed from all its earthly bourns,
 Within the silent realms of thought
 Brief hours sojourns?

And laughs and weeps, and hates and loves,
 And leaves a trail of ecstasy
 And sorrow, as a meteor leaves
 Its path across the sky?

I know not if these vision-realms
Live outward or within us go;
But I know that I know many men
Whom I do not know!

LXXVI

In the Byzant temple's
Great, imposing nave
I saw the Gothic tomb, by the uncertain
Light that stained-glass windows dimly gave.

A book held in her hands
Folded across her breast,
Upon the stony pall a lovely woman —
A marvel of the chisel — lay at rest.

'Neath the sweet weight her bed
Of granite sagged, as 'twere
Her pliant form reclined upon a couch
Of softest satin and of gossamer.

Of her final smile
There lingered in her face
Celestial splendor, as the firmament
Retains the dying sun's fugitive rays.

Seated on the edge
Of the stony pall
Two angels, fingers held upon their lips,
Commanded silence o'er that sainted hall.

She seemed not dead ;
 Asleep she seemed to be
 Under the shadow of the massive vault,
 As one who, dreaming, Paradise doth see.

To the nave's obscure
 Corner I drew close,
 As one who with a muffled tread approaches
 The cradle where an infant doth repose.

I gazed on her a space :
 That light celestial,
 That granite bed that dumbly seemed to offer
 Another, empty, place against the wall,

Quickened in my spirit
 The thirst for infinity
 And all the yearnings of this life for death,
 To which the centuries but an instant be . . .

* * * * *
 * * * * *

Wearied of the combat
 Wherein I struggling live,
 Sometimes that corner, hidden and obscure,
 Memory doth in enviousness revive.

That mute and pallid lady !
 I say, remembering her :
 Oh, what love so serene as that of death !
 What sleep so tranquil as the sepulcher !

[illegible]

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Becquer, Gustavo Adolfo.

The infinite passion.

DATE

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8 28 '46

Lester Mann

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